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An Acorn Store-house of the California Woodpecker

BY WALTER K. FISHER

MOST Californians are familiar with the acorn-hoarding habits of the California woodpecker (*Melanerpes f. bairdi*). During the late fall and winter this bird, with praiseworthy industry, stores great quantities of acorns, preferably the slender ones of the California live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*). Holes are drilled into the bark of trees and the acorns are inserted and wedged in so tightly as to defy anything but steel. Altho one finds scattered acorns in the bark of eucalyptus, in telegraph poles, in fence posts, in the sides of houses, or wedged under shingles, the woodpeckers seem to prefer the live oak in the valleys. In the mountains conifers are sometimes used.

The birds show a decided preference for certain trees and use the same tree and the same holes year after year, adding new holes as time goes by. In front of Dr. David Starr Jordan's residence at Stanford University, California, is a large live oak which is somewhat famous among trees. Its bark is closely studded with acorns, even out onto the smaller limbs. On account of its size the tree is difficult to photograph. The accompanying illustration, taken last February by Dr. A. K. Fisher, shows only a part of the "acorned" surface. As will be seen the acorns are closely placed. Some of them have been driven into the ends of old partially decayed nuts, which they have telescoped, the old shell enclosing the fresh acorn. Only a portion of the acorns are eaten by the woodpeckers, many remaining till they decay or are "driven to the wall" by the insertion of a fresh crop. After a time the bark partially decays about the old holes, so that the acorns will not fit tightly. Such holes, some of which are seen in the illustration, are often abandoned. This oak is the finest specimen of an "acorned" tree I have ever seen. I believe no photograph of it has heretofore been published.

Palo Alto, California.



LIVE OAK STUDDED WITH ACORNS, THE WORK OF THE CALIFORNIA
WOODPECKER AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA

Photographed by Dr. A. K. Fisher